

Horizontality reconsidered. Contesting (re)densification from Guadalajara's edge.

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This paper elaborates a critical case study of *Huentitán* district located at the northeast edge of Guadalajara, Mexico, where the city meets the natural landscape of the *Oblatos* Canyon to unfold the conflicts and contradictions of recent re-densification plans pushed by national and local authorities in close cooperation with private developers. *Huentitán* is an exemplary site entangling polarized relations between bottom-up and top-down agencies. In its grounds, market-driven production of space encounters direct opposition from the neighbours who have been systematically excluded from the decision making over their city and environment. In this case, the struggles revolve around privatization of public space, the lack of urban amenities paradoxically coupled with the existence of large urban voids, and the environmental degradation of the canyon's surroundings; demands which are not simply circumscribed in a popular resistance towards a 'post-political' discourse on re-densification, but could be the starting points for articulating wider strategies across varied territorial scales. The study draws upon intensive fieldwork and mapping that brings together different views of the urban space by measuring its physical, social and economic features. Combining in-depth participant observation of the actors in dispute with morpho-typological urban analyses and interpretative cartographies. This allows to accurately identify contested spaces and to reveal the conflicting interplay between state policies, market agents and civil society. Furthermore, I suggest that *Huentitán* could be a testing ground where citizens' counterclaims could be assembled into new urban paradigms that transcend the current dichotomy of low-rise sprawl versus concentrated verticalization in favour of hybrid configurations between built environment and nature. Ultimately addressing social justice in the city, and opening up new possibilities for a radical horizontal redistribution of power; a scenario that could shape inclusive forms of urbanity within the hierarchical constellation of Guadalajara's Metropolitan Area.

Built and political landscapes

Urbanization background, introduction to the horizontality of Guadalajara

Historically, asymmetrical development processes closely related to housing production have determined the urbanization in Mexico (Ortiz Struck 2014). Carried out either by the private sector's search for profits or by the urgency of the dispossessed, the outskirts of Mexican cities have witnessed a tremendous horizontal expansion during the last three decades (Eibenschutz & Goya 2009). According to official data from the Secretariat of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social SEDESOL*), from 1980 to 2010 the surface of Mexican cities expanded at a rate of 9.7% per year, which is almost three times the population growth rate, situated at 3.4% yearly. This continuing growth generates a fragmented low-density urban model reigned by dispersion and isolation of the population (Eibenschutz & Goya 2009), perpetuating and intensifying socio-spatial segregations in the whole country (Sohn 2011). Moreover, it has been argued that such impaired urban expansion triggers –either directly or indirectly– an important displacement phenomenon of middle to low-income population towards the urban fringes (Janoschka et al. 2014). The case of Guadalajara is no exception. The development of the second largest city in Mexico followed the same transformation pattern of many Latin American cities: an emptying core, combined with an ever, horizontally and monotonously extending periphery (Cruz Solís 2012). The rapid pace of both formal and informal suburbanization has exceeded the capacity of governments to cope with the demand of needed infrastructure and services in such a way that sustainability is evidently jeopardized (Eibenschutz & Carrillo 2011). As can be expected, the ongoing process reproduces and it is not strengthening the spatial differentiations in the city, creating places of exclusion, fracturing the social fabric, and generating numerous urban voids (Fausto & Rábago 2001). Abandonment, vacancy and neglect seem to be at the order of the day in the core of the metropolis, while the gentry concentrate in luxury enclaves, adding more unconnected pieces to the already fragmented metropolitan area (Cabrales 2001). This phenomenon denotes the uneven power relations steering urbanization in the GMA; the wealthy settlements occupy privileged locations within the *Atemajac* Valley¹, close to natural territorial figures such as the *Primavera* forest, and benefit from all basic services by municipalities, while basic infrastructure takes years to reach the informal settlements (Fausto Brito 2012). Urban amenities such as public spaces, schools, hospitals and workplaces are also missing in formal *fraccionamientos*², obliging its dwellers to travel greater distances and pay higher transportation costs to fulfil their every-day needs, and remaining spatially isolated in an ever more unsafe environment (Eibenschutz & Carrillo 2011). This panorama accounts for a deep restructuring of the political agencies in the contemporary city, where “governance has been steered mostly by private interest groups and powerful politico-economic

¹ Name of the geographical position where the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area is situated

² Common name for recently-built, social-interest housing developments

networks with little regard for the social” (Sohn 2011, p.79). From clientelist practices, to the market-led development of today, urbanization in Mexico has been defined by the conflicting interaction between the State –in the form of urban and economic policy–, civil society –through social movements or collective actors– and market forces through the private sector. The urban landscape of Guadalajara clearly reflects these different political ideologies and its contestations through time. Since the massive rural-urban migration during the 1950’s and 1960’s, until the neoliberal pro sprawl policies of the 1990’s and 2000’s, the city staged varied struggles for the production and appropriation of space. It is in the intersection between these different actors and in light of a new phase of negotiations in the urban arena where this contribution is situated.

(post)Political materializations. Verticalization of Guadalajara

Today, the on-going transformation of Guadalajara points towards a new phenomenon of centralization through verticalization. This is anyways promoted by top-down approaches, aiming to restrain city sprawl and geographically shift the arena of (re)development onto the existing urban fabric of the core. Cleaning up and renewing vacant areas also, so is understood, augmenting securitization of urban spaces, ‘rescuing’ them from the all-together dangerous and unproductive metropolis (Becker & Müller 2013). The ‘National Program of Urban Development’ and the ‘National Housing Program 2014-2018’ announced by president Peña-Nieto are crucial. Such policies seek to curb the unsustainable way in which cities have unfolded; resulting in official plans that promote restraining city sprawl, encouraging the ‘compact city’, and the pursuit of a “smart and sustainable urban model” (DOF 2014:2) supported by federal subsidies and grants³. This national back-to-the-city policy has been well received by Guadalajara’s local authorities. The Ramiro Hernandez’s administration⁴ has adopted an urban redensification strategy with the goal of re-populating the central municipality after losing more than 151,000 inhabitants since the 1990’s (Cruz Solis 2012), and to revert its negative taxation index⁵. This is translated in ‘consensual’ re-development operations, which materialize in the form of strategic urban projects, new commercial complexes, and especially, new vertical housing [fig.1]. Within this setting, the central space of Guadalajara with its voids amidst a horizontally organized low-rise urban fabric is conceived by the real estate sector as a unique opportunity for profit making through redevelopment operations. However, fundamental questions arise, as to whom are directed these new developments? In which way these transformations are implemented? To which goals and needs do the strategies respond? What would be the effects of such urban transformations?



[fig.1] Verticalization of Guadalajara. The central municipality of Guadalajara and the location of new, on-going and planned vertical projects as of 2015. Source: elaborated by the author.

In parallel and as a reaction to such urban renewal, there is a rising advocacy for alternative urban realities by local social movements, who have demonstrated their capacity to produce change by tactically intervening in the city (Morfin 2011, 2012, Castañón Reyes 2014). Responding to inhabitants’ real needs and coherence with the everyday practices of the people are placed at the very core of their agenda. No wonder why they contrast with urban projects that solely apply the logics of capital accumulation (Harvey 2012, Smith 2012). In

³ For example, the implementation of government schemes such as PROCURHA *Programa de Consolidación Urbana y Rescate Habitacional* [Urban consolidation and housing rescue program] amongst others, which offer a series of subsidies to renew the urban fabric of Mexican cities.

⁴ Mayor of Guadalajara since 2012 until September 2015.

⁵ By May of 2015, Guadalajara was the second most indebted municipality of Mexico. See: El Financiero., 2015. Guadalajara y Ecatepec lideran deuda. [online] Available at: <<http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/economia/guadalajara-y-ecatepec-lideran-deuda.html>> [Accessed August 22 2015].

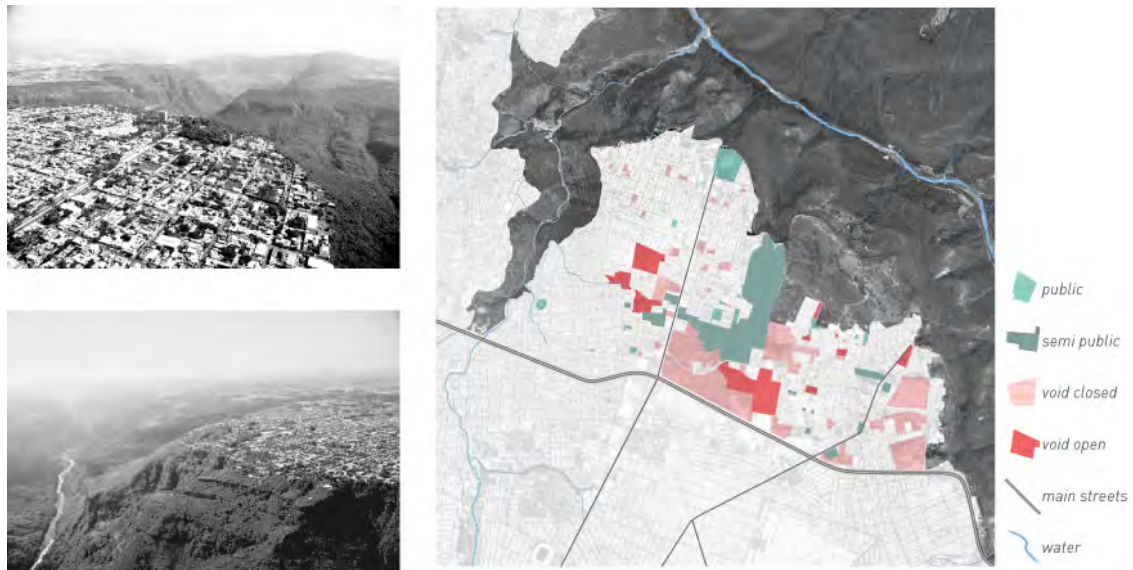
Guadalajara the practices and citizens' movements have been widely studied (Shefner 2012, Shefner 2001, Morfin 2012, Ceja & Cázares 2011, Alatorre-Rodríguez 2013, González Aguirre 2013). Past and current examples include associations with very specific goals, varying from issues of urban violence and security, to bicycle mobility, environmental activism, and bottom-up ways of managing the city by confronting government corruption and institutional weakness (Alatorre-Rodríguez 2013, Jimenez & García 2014). Today in Guadalajara, however, we can find several examples of contestations triggered by municipal redensification plans, which has led to the emergence of new collective actors. This renewed contestation over the future urbanization calls for a deeper understanding of the embedded rationalities of the territory in order to negotiate or mediate between these antagonistic urban visions and practices (De Meulder et al. 2008) and to subsequently devise alternative scenarios. The following section addresses the *Huentitán* district, an exemplary site entangling the polarized relations between bottom-up and top-down agencies. In its grounds, consensual market-driven production of space encounters direct opposition from one organization, the *Frente Unido por Huentitán* (FUH) or Huentitán United Front, composed of neighbors who have been systematically excluded from the decision making over their city and environment; making it an ideal case study to unfold the conflicts and contradictions in the sketched redensification process. This section elaborates an urban analysis of Huentitán, combining top-down and bottom-up mapping, visualizing physical characteristics of the site and reflecting its spatiality with socio-political and environmental aspects. This is presented in parallel with interviews and testimonies of the FUH collected through fieldwork conducted in the spring of 2015.

Contesting re-densification from *Huentitán*.

Morpho-typological analysis of Guadalajara's edge

Huentitán rests at the edge of the *Oblatos* canyon (also known as *Oblatos-Huentitán* or simply *Huentitán* canyon) in the northeast of Guadalajara within the municipal limits of Tonalá, Zapotlanejo, Ixtlahuacán River and Zapopan in Guadalajara metropolitan area. Here the city abruptly comes to an end against the stunning beauty of the canyon's landscape [fig.2]. The *Oblatos-Huentitán* canyon has a depth of 600 meters approximately, and its surroundings have been catalogued as a protected natural area by the municipality in 1997, for it represents the major 'green' space of Guadalajara, and for its important bio-diversity and ecological heritage (Ayto. C. de Guadalajara 1997). The original Huentitán settlement is as old as Guadalajara, but it remained remote, as just another surrounding village, until the 20th century when the horizontal expansion of the city overtook it. The extension of the central *Calzada Independencia* and *Belisario Domínguez* avenues during the 1960's had important implications for its urbanization. Then, during the 1970s and 1980, the Huentitán *ejidos*⁶ where subject to land invasions, giving way to the emergence of large informal settlements. By looking at the groundlayer map [fig.2] we realize that although Huentitán district possesses numerous and vast open spaces, most of them are partially or completely inaccessible, and others are simply abandoned. These spaces include the Guadalajara Zoo, permanent fairgrounds called '*Selva Mágica*' and the abandoned site of the former Science and Technology Centre '*Planetario*', closed in 2009. Different sized urban voids exist within the many neighbourhoods of Huentitán and this contributes to create an image of spatial degradation and fragmentation. It should be noted that there is a great lack of proper green spaces in the city, whether for leisure or sport. Although the Huentitán Canyon is considered the biggest green space of the metropolis, it acts more as counter-figure, an 'outside' of difficult access flanked by a hard edge of extreme topography, rather than a truly incorporated 'green' space.

⁶ The *ejido* is a communally held land. This land tenure scheme was established after the Mexican revolution in 1917.



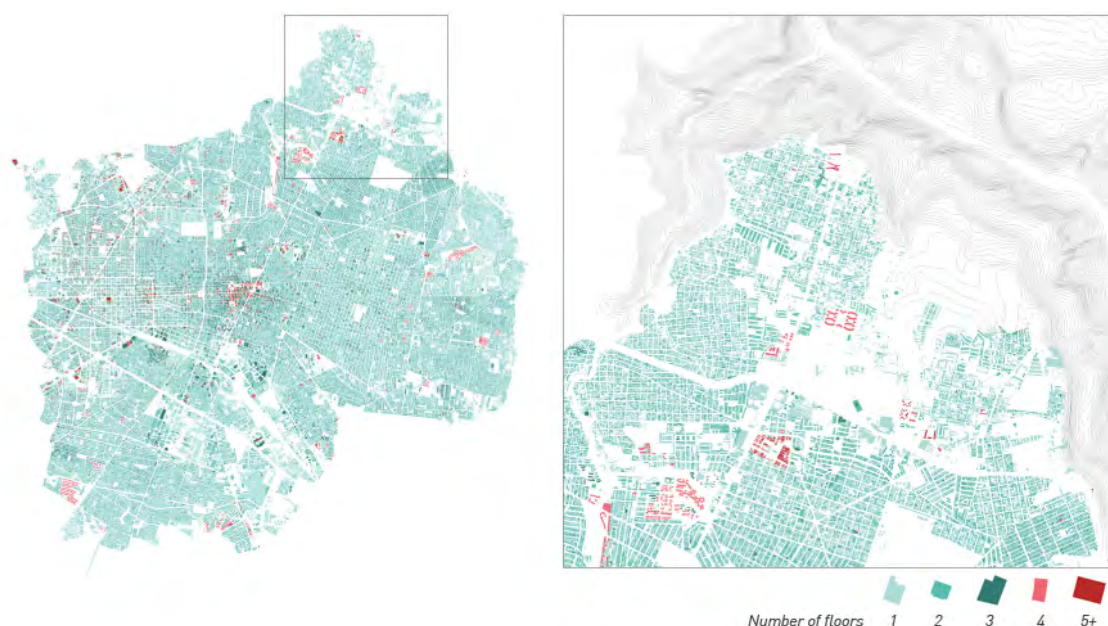
[fig.2] Groundlayer. Aerial views of the Huentitán Canyon. Source: El Informador http://issuu.com/el_informador/docs/barranca. Map showing a characterization of the open spaces. Source: map elaborated by the author.



[fig.3] Urban tissues of Huentitán. Source: elaborated by the author.

As the majority of the city, Huentitán's urban fabric is composed mostly of low-rise buildings, although we can find examples of vertical housing, breaking the horizontal homogeneity of the built landscape. Its urbanization unfolded in various stages in time under different (political) conditions. Figure 3 shows an interpretative approach to the different urban tissues that compose Huentitán in order to problematize its specific features. The farthest tissue located at the edge of the canyon rests on lands formerly owned by the University of Guadalajara, which subsequently were fractioned and sold for urbanization purposes. Here the urban form is composed of a clear grid of streets [fig.3], following the main *Calzada Independencia* axis. The majority of architectural typologies found in this tissue correspond to middle class single housing, although in the eastern part it is possible to find luxury villas and in the northern edge rests the faculty of arts, architecture and design of the University of Guadalajara. The settlements adjacent to the ring road *anillo periférico* are composed of originally informal settlements, which most of them already have been regularized. Its morphology follows a subdivision of land carried out without clear patterns [fig.3]. This part of Huentitán presents chronic problems of accessibility [fig.3] –also pointed out by residents–, the sloping topography and the ring road act as an infrastructural barrier isolating and disconnecting these tissues from the rest of the city. The *Calzada Independencia* becomes the only direct connection to the city centre by public transport. Self-

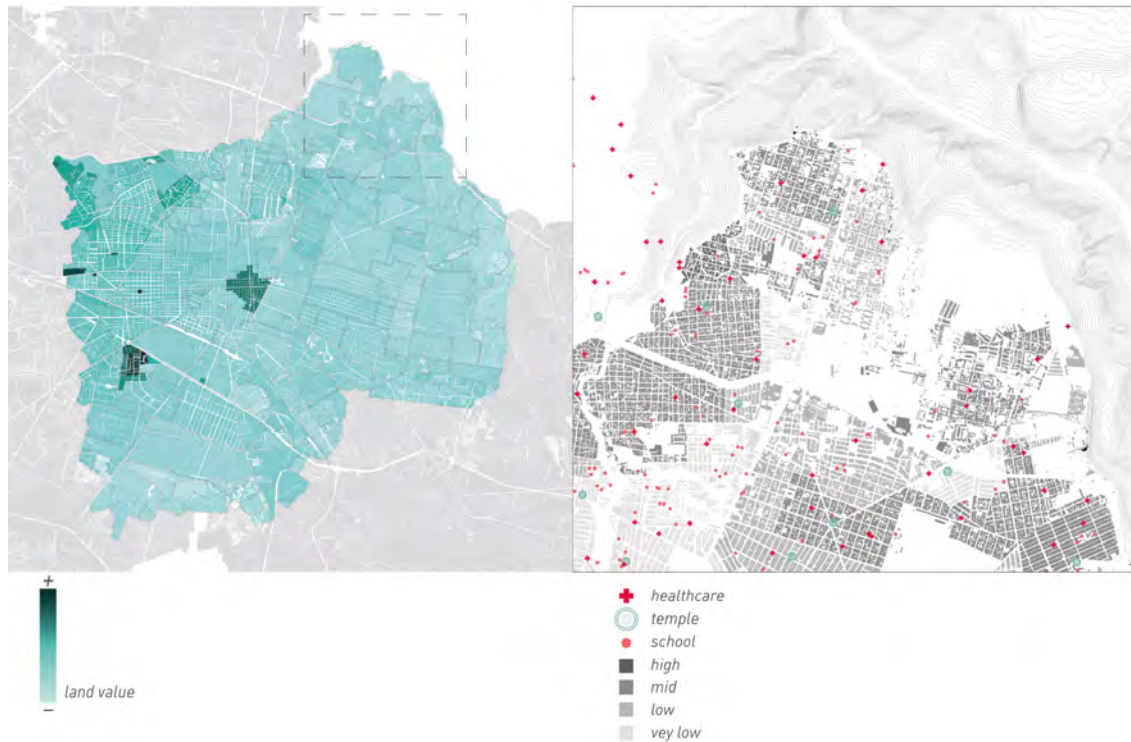
built housing, typical of the consolidated *colonias populares*⁷ mainly composes the architectural typologies of these tissues [fig.3]. As previously outlined, various vertical housing developments exist in the area. The majority of them are ‘common-interest developments’, built during the 1990’s for workers affiliated to the biggest housing institution of the country, *INFONAVIT*. Although the general condition of the built environment is horizontal, the actual population density ranges from 90 to 150 inhabitants per hectare (INEGI 2010), making this locality denser than the average of the city. This condition is well known by the long-time residents, who mock the ‘redensification’ discourse by asserting that “there has been barely any displacement of people, there is no abandonment like in the centre and there is no one to ‘bring back’ here”. Nevertheless, there is dramatic non-uniform occupation of land as we can see in the built environment map [fig.4] and the general condition of the dwellings is not optimal, evidencing the need for urban consolidation. A series of gated communities scattered around also can be found, nevertheless, their genesis responds to marketing strategies rather than real security issues. *Huentitán El Bajo* is not considered a dangerous neighbourhood, and many inhabitants of these gated communities are also active within the FUH.



[fig.4] Built environment. Visualization of every building in Guadalajara according to its height. Source: elaborated by the author from cadastre data courtesy of *Dirección de Catastro. H. Ayuntamiento de Guadalajara*.

By looking at the marginalization index map [fig.5] based on the methodology of *CONAPO* (National Population Council) it is possible to realize *Huentitán's* socio-economical diversity. This index takes into account different variables for its calculation, such as the household income, educational level, school attendance, employment, the availability of welfare services and finally, the quality of the dwellings. *Huentitán* is known as a popular *barrio*, and certainly, the majority of its population belongs to the working class. Nevertheless, different social strata coexist in a relatively small area, and this spatial characteristic is also visible in the United Front of *Huentitán*; members from different settlers’ associations banded together in a coalition representing most of *Huentitán* neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, spatial issues like the lack of urban services, schools, and healthcare facilities, coupled with the imminent privatization of public spaces and verticalization have probed to transcend class differences and conform a counter-hegemonic movement. The actual welfare facilities are also pointed out in the map [fig.5]. On the other hand, according to data provided by the cadastre office of Guadalajara, the land values in *Huentitán* district are listed slightly below the average price range in comparison with the rest of the municipality [fig. 5]. This suggest that, due to the relatively cheap land prices and its central location within the metropolis, it is logical that *Huentitán* is subject to real estate pressures for development.

⁷ *Colonias populares* is the given name to (post)informal settlements built during the 1970’s and 1980’s that possess similar socio-economic and morphological characteristics. See: Jiménez Huerta, E. & Cruz Solís, H. (eds.) 2012. *Superada la informalidad, nuevos desafíos: políticas para las colonias populares consolidadas*. Guadalajara: Editorial Universitaria.



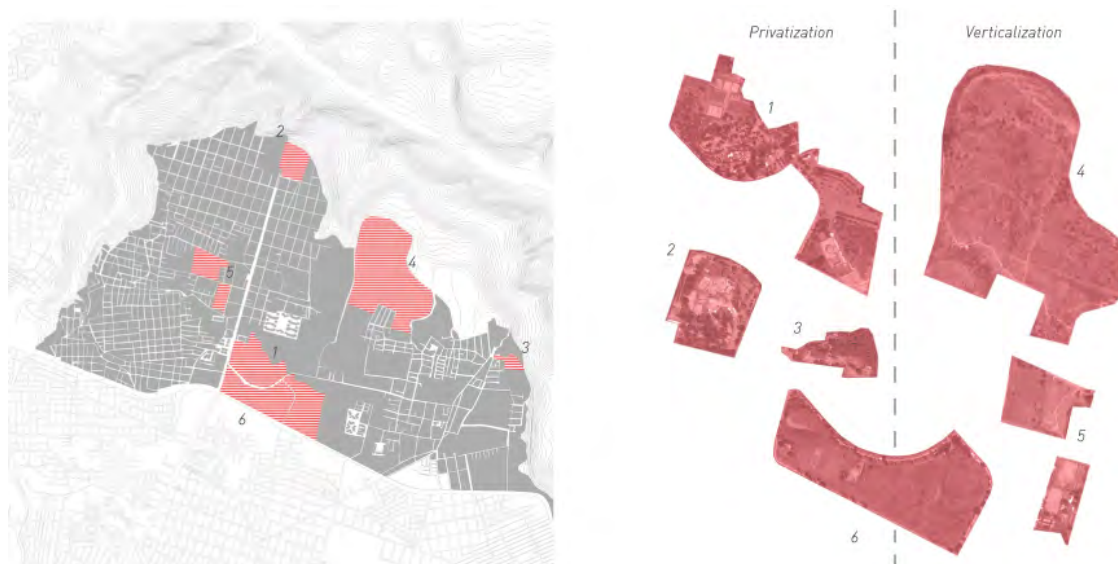
[fig.5] Land values and marginalization index. Source: elaborated by the author from cadaster data and CONAPO.

Huentitán's United Front and its contested spaces

The new strategies for 'redensification' are embodied in official planning instruments that have become the bone of contention between citizens, real estate developers and authorities. The Partial Urban Development Plans [*Planes Parciales de Desarrollo Urbano (PPDU)*] are one of a wide range of urban planning tools that the municipality of Guadalajara possesses. These plans went through a public consultation process, where the top-down proposals advocating for higher population density were closely discussed with neighbours. For this reason, in September 2014, scattered neighbourhood groups of Huentitán came together. Their main concern was attracting the attention of the settlers to encourage participation in the government initiative. Empowered by their actions, they decided to follow the consultation process until the end, and they even asked the organizers of the consultancy to do a second meeting, to compare the final results. After all, the final versions of the PPDU's did not reflect the results of such 'participative' process, polarizing the stakeholders' positions by allowing new building heights up to 20 floors in Huentitán, what most of the people consulted determinedly opposed. Such radical modification of the zoning plans evidenced the intricate relationship between corporate interests and local authorities⁸, due to the various mega projects latent in Huentitán grounds that had not been able to materialize due to lack of legal underpinnings such as zoning and density regulations. This literal "translation of corporate agendas into public policy (in this case the PPDU's) through close formal and informal cooperation with [real estate] business networks" mutes proper urban politics, where not just the economy but also the production of the city itself is "increasingly insulated from even the most limited forms of democratic accountability" (Swyngedouw & Wilson 2014:9). This accounts for the emergence of a post political condition in the city, where "the ability to steer urban transformation via political, social or economic endeavours disappears" (Kaminer et al. 2011:15) in favour of the current market hegemony and its related practices. Subsequently, the neighbourhood groups met again to conform a united front of resistance towards what they called 'rigged partial plans'. However, by conforming the neighborhoods' coalition, their goals expanded. Now their demands are not simply circumscribed in a popular resistance towards the post-political nature of the PPDU's and their advocacy for re-densification, but address other urban issues underlying in their community, such as the privatization of more than the half of *Mirador* park by a private association that promotes a contemporary art museum designed by Herzog & De Meuron, the lack of urban amenities paradoxically coupled with the existence of large urban voids, inefficient public transportation, and the environmental degradation of not just the canyon surroundings but the whole metropolitan area. Urban social movements dealing with urbanization-related issues in Guadalajara and Mexico have traditionally been formed around land and housing access struggles, and their capacity to exert

⁸ In the local media they call it 'the real estate cartel', referring to the close links between private developers and public servers. See: <http://lajornadajalisco.com.mx/2015/07/parlamento-de-colonias-denuncia-un-cartel-inmobiliario-en-guadalajara/>

change was defined by political partisanship and clientelistic activities (Shefner 2001, Ward 1998). However, it can be argued that contemporary urban movements in Guadalajara such as the FUH have shifted their claims from ‘the right to dwell’ –focused on satisfying the urgency of material needs (Shefner 2001)– towards ‘the right to the city’ (Alatorre-Rodríguez 2013), consequently adopting different approaches and strategies for action. Mobilizing not just for the accomplishment of individual rights, but also for goals that imply a re-articulation of social and cultural dynamics shaping the production of lived space as a whole (Lefebvre 1991). After interviewing and observing various community events and attending meetings of the FUH, it was possible to map the contested spaces where they are active [fig.6].



[fig.6] Contested spaces. 1- Huentitán Natural Park remained partially closed due a concession to the Directorate of Parks and Gardens of the municipality for the construction of municipal greenhouses, today the government has plans of ceding the park to another private association. 2- *Mirador* Park partially closed due to construction of *Barranca* Museum. 3- *Puerta Barranca* Park, currently appropriated by the municipal workers union. 4- '*Voltea a la Barranca*' project of luxury towers. 5- *Huevito* housing.

The conflicts within Huentitán basically revolve around two main issues: privatization of public space and redensification through verticalization. Regarding the latter, it is pertinent to mention that the dominant form of residence in the Mexican neoliberal city is given through formal ‘common-interest developments’ locally known as '*fraccionamientos*' (Sohn 2011 p.76). And as such, the actual redensification strategies of developers, attempt to vertically transfer that ‘excel-spreadsheet urbanization’ of the peripheries into Huentitán, through the construction of what is colloquially known as '*huevo*' housing⁹. This was publicly announced by the mayor Ramiro Hernandez in one of the urban voids known as '*Los Cueros*' [fig.6]. Other example is a former sports club currently abandoned, where private developers plan to build 1800 new vertical dwellings [fig. 6]. In this regard, the views of FUH members are diverse. Some claim that *huevo* housing should be illegal, due to its minimal and “inhuman” design, –around 36 m2 each dwelling– “tiny little houses, with bedrooms where you can barely enter, like the ones they built in *Tlajomulco*”, referring to the aforementioned minimal typology. For some, this is reason enough to oppose to their construction. Others are simply against the densification of their neighbourhood, stating that “the streets and public transport will collapse; they take away our sport spaces and also there is not even the capacity of potable water, drainage and electricity to put thousands of new people in here.” Nonetheless, most of them are not against redensification per se, as one FUH member mentions: “We do not oppose vertical constructions. I know that vertical housing has its benefits, but we need urban facilities first!”. After a deep observation of the actors in dispute, it is possible to argue that the conflict over redensification through verticalization has been assimilated as a dichotomy: either vertical or nothing, limiting the future imaginaries and shaping divergent urban scenarios between the stakeholders. Regarding the privatization of public spaces, the cases abound in Huentitán. One of the most notable is the *Iconia* (formerly called *Puerta Guadalajara*), a commercial and luxury apartment complex projected in one of the scarce land reserves of the municipality [fig.6] catalogued as a public green area in the zoning plans. In line with the logic and discipline of capitalist development and market-led urban growth (Brenner & Theodore 2005) this public land was ceded to Spanish real estate developers in 2008 in exchange of their foreign investment, creation of temporal jobs and building one school and healthcare facilities. Apart

⁹ Literally meaning ‘little egg’ or ‘small egg’ housing

from the modest benefits it would bring, such investments only respond to economic inter-urban competition dynamics (Harvey 2001) rather than giving answers to, for example, chronic urban issues such as the huge deficit of green spaces or the highly inefficient water management of the city¹⁰. This is especially evident within a free market context such as the Mexican, where “cities are increasingly dependent upon their own revenue-generating capacity” (Becker & Müller 2013, p.81), often neglecting the social and environmental spheres in favour of creating ‘welcoming business environments’ (Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014). The financial crisis coupled with institutional incompetence in order to recover the land, cause that until today, the site continues to be abandoned. Just beside, the derelict Technology Centre ‘*Planetario*’ and the partially accessible *Parque Natural Huentitán* (Huentitán Natural Park) are subject to imminent privatization and construction of new fairgrounds and a music forum called *Fiestas de Octubre*. This development operations are however, exerted in exclusionary top-down manner through public-private partnerships, excluding the ordinary citizens from the discussions regarding the future of the park, and ultimately enforcing Eurocentric urban production systems such as the neoliberal project (Harvey 2005, Quijano 2000). In this case, one of the tactics used by the FUH is direct action on site. The association has been regularly organizing sportive and cultural events, literally occupying the fenced park [fig.7], and at the same time organizing reforestation and rehabilitation actions. By confronting and activating those places, the FUH is actually expanding the public realm, creating spaces where a dialog with authorities could occur and effectively re-programming urban space through collective activities.



[fig.7] Community race organized by the FUH in the contested future fairgrounds. Source: FUH Facebook page.

Moreover, what distinguishes the United Front of Huentitán from other collective actors opposing redensification in Guadalajara, is its capacity for organizing resistance not just on a local and tactical level, but utilizing both, formal and informal channels. While some members are engaged in activities of reforestation, public space regeneration and other community-led actions, at the same time, their battle is being fought through legal means. Members of the united front won a legal appeal towards the new urban plans that regulate *Huentitán* district. This signified the suspension of every new urban development project, including *buevito* housing and the new fairgrounds. Though this is a temporal measure to gain some respite and formulate counterproposals, as well as it serves symbolic goals (Decreus et al. 2014). As one of the members of FUH states: “We need to make known our struggle and the victory we obtained: the writ of *amparo*¹¹. It is an unprecedented event; nobody had ever defeated the government in this regard (urban planning). They even sent a legal adviser from the federation to counter our *amparo*.”

Horizontality reconsidered

As we have seen in Guadalajara, “the basic neoliberal imperative of mobilizing city space as an arena for growth and market discipline remained the dominant municipal project” (Mayer 2011:51). Neoliberalism’s

¹⁰ The poor water management of the city and out-dated infrastructure causes that 40% of the water supply is lost, and the current m2 of green spaces per inhabitant is close to 3m2.

¹¹ The Mexican *Amparo* is a legal protection recourse invoked when individuals or a set of persons believe their constitutional rights have been violated.

inability to take into account the long term (Gleason 2012) and its emphasis on individual freedom (Harvey 2005) is reflected in the lack of a 'city project,' understood "as a failure to create a vision of the physical, social and economic dimensions of a sustainable future" (Eibenschutz & Carrillo 2011:89). This is evident in the case of Guadalajara Metropolitan Area, resulting in a horizontal, fragmented, but nevertheless hierarchic 'centre-periphery' urban structure. As we have seen through the case study, a meaningful redistribution of the stakes within urban processes is the ultimate goal of the United Front of Huentitán, coinciding with many cases across Latin America (Gleason 2011). This brewing transformation of the agencies shaping the city is a call for 'horizontality'; rather than illustrating a historical morphological condition, accounts for a radical redistribution -or what Quijano (2000) calls 'socialization'- of power. Such redistribution invoked by citizens through the United Front of Huentitán, could shape 'horizontal' forms of organization between institutions – formal and informal– and contribute to the search of alternative urban futures in the contemporary Latin American city. The main challenge for Huentitán's collective actors is to move beyond protest and ephemeral tactics and formulate concrete, coherent and viable proposals bound to the socio-spatial specificities of the context in order to counteract the capitalist logic of place commodification (Logan & Molotch 1987) that has co-opted their few public spaces. On this point, urbanist professionals play a central role, contributing to the struggle by devising re-distributive strategies for the territory in close cooperation with citizens; strategies flexible enough to be adapted in wider metropolitan-regional scales, aiming at the 'radical equalization' of the material and political instrumentalities (Purcell 2008). Designerly explorations in this case could function as 'eye openers' (De Meulder et al. 2004) to reveal hidden potentials in these contested spaces and re-articulate the conflicting stakeholders standpoints. "Design as a medium of reflection and negotiation is not passive, but serves as an active and evolving instrument through which suggestions are absorbed, processed and incorporated, alternatives generated, and conflicts resolved" (Ibid: 194). Through the previous analysis, Huentitán becomes a testing ground where citizens' counterclaims could be assembled into new urban paradigms that transcend the current dichotomy of low-rise sprawl versus concentrated verticalization in favour of hybrid configurations between built environment and nature. Ultimately addressing social justice in the city, and opening up new possibilities for a radical horizontal redistribution of power; a scenario that could shape inclusive forms of urbanity within the hierarchical constellation of Guadalajara's Metropolitan Area.

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